

Testimony of Erik Markiewicz
Commerce Committee Public Hearing
February 19, 2015
LOB 1D
10:00 AM

RE: SUPPORT OF PROPOSED S.B. 726, AN ACT CONCERNING RENAISSANCE DISTRICTS

Senator Hartley, Representative Perrone, Senator Frantz, Representative Camillo and members of the Commerce Committee, my name is Erik Markiewicz. I am the Chairman of the Watertown Planning and Zoning Commission and am here this morning to testify in support of Proposed S.B. 726, An Act Concerning Renaissance Districts, introduced by Sen. Robert Kane.

Watertown is a very small town. Our population is just over 22,000 and our entire Municipal Budget is \$27,365,718. Our mill rate is 29.12 mills. Clearly our ability to do much in the way of discretionary spending is limited. Like so many other small towns in Connecticut, we are careful with how every tax dollar is spent.

But what we lack in financial resources, we make up for in the creativity, resourcefulness and spirit of cooperation of our community. We have a vibrant arts community; a Main Street that is defined and anchored on one end by a Historic District and a quaint "Country Cinema" housed in a building dating back to 1909. On the other end is the Clockwork Repertory Theater featuring community productions. It also houses an art studio. In between runs our Main Street lined with small shops, a number of which cater to the arts. We have several music stores, dance studio, dancer supply store, photography studio, and at least two establishments featuring a live music venue, along with a number restaurants. Unfortunately a recent addition has been a number of vacant storefronts.

As a community we have rallied and done what we could to revitalize our downtown. During the summer, our Park and Recreation Department has sponsored very successful Friday Night Out on Main Street events featuring local artists and musicians, attracting over a thousand people from the surrounding area. We hold a Saturday Farmers' Market. With Senator Kane's help we have established a Watertown/Oakville Merchants of Main Street Association; sponsored a Santa's Light Parade; Holiday Tree Lighting; storefront decorating contest; and Small Business Saturday events.

But now we need your help. Our theaters are in desperate need of rehabilitation and renovation. Our downtown infrastructure is in need of repair. We need financial help with cleanup and beautification efforts. We cannot do what is needed by ourselves. Unfortunately, there are many resources and state funding available for communities with more than 100,000 in population. Very little for small towns, which are the heart of our state. Please help us by supporting SB 726.

Thank you for the opportunity of testifying before you today.